

5 Investments in working parents

The use of parental leave

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Introduction

Both national governments and organizations increasingly invest in working parents by offering them work–family policies such as part-time work, childcare support, or family leave policies (maternity, paternity, and parental leave) (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011; Den Dulk, Peters, & Poutsma, 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017b). These policies are designed to help employees with young children to better combine work and family life, and can potentially increase employees' work–family balance as well as their work performance (Kossek & Friede, 2006; Wheatley, 2017). However, despite these potentially positive outcomes, there is a huge discrepancy between work–family policy *availability* and work–family policy *use*, especially for men (Beauregard, 2011; OECD, 2016). Research has suggested that this is not just due to a lack of interest – there are also many people who have access to work–family policies and would like to use these, but who still refrain from doing so (Adams et al., 2016; McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005). This suggests that there are structural constraints that restrict the utilization of work–family policies that are officially available. We will focus on one central player: the organization.

Research on the relation between organizations and work–family policy utilization is relatively scarce and scattered, with the majority of studies focusing on work–family policy *availability* (Den Dulk, 2001; Den Dulk & Peper, 2007). These studies mostly look at whether organizations provide additional work–family policies on top of the statutory policies they are obliged to provide by law. However, organizations are also gatekeepers to the statutory work–family policies; even though employees are officially entitled to the provisions contained in these policies, organizations can in practice, through informal means, strongly discourage or encourage employees from utilizing work–family policies (Boon, Paauwe, Boselie, & Den Hartog, 2009; Goodstein, 1994; Lewis & Smithson, 2001). Most of what we know about the relationship between organizations and work–family policy utilization comes from qualitative studies, which have provided valuable insights into people's perceptions of organizational restraints and support for utilization (e.g., Kaufman, 2017; Lewis & Den Dulk, 2008; Ter

Hoeven, Miller, Peper, & Den Dulk, 2017). Few quantitative studies focus on organizations and policy utilization, and those that exist rarely study the individual and the organization at the same time, either relying on samples of individuals, who provide limited information on their organizational context (e.g., Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), or on case studies conducted among the employees or managers of one or a few organizations (e.g., Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Den Dulk & Peper, 2007; Haas, Allard, & Hwang, 2002; Pasamar, 2015; Pettigrew, 2014; Smith & Gardner, 2007).¹ The European Sustainable Workforce Survey (ESWS) allows us to be among the first to make a large-scale, systematic study of the relationship between organizations and work–family policy utilization in multiple European countries. The survey’s multilevel nature allows us to combine reports from individual employees with reports from managers and the organization (as represented by the HR manager), which limits common-method bias (the bias that occurs when the same respondent reports on multiple variables) and controls for unobserved organizational characteristics that might affect employee outcomes (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

In this chapter we will focus on how organizations relate to the use of one type of work–family policy: parental leave.² In doing so, we will combine two ways of looking at organizations: the family-supportiveness of their organizational culture, and by treating them as actors that make strategic choices to invest in policies. Although few studies have looked at organizations and work–family policy use, those that do focus almost exclusively on the role of organizational support, reasoning that employees are more likely to use work–family policies when they receive support from the organizational culture and their manager (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). We combine these ideas on organizational support with institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and business-case argumentation (Den Dulk, 2001; Kossek & Friede, 2006), both of which maintain that organizations make the strategic choice to adopt work–family policies when this is in their own interest. We will explore whether this argument can also be extended to policy use, because it is likely that the strategic choices of organizations extend to utilization – for example, through increased access. Lastly, we will pay special attention to gender. Gender norms impose different expectations regarding participation in work and family on men and women (Kanji & Samuel, 2017; Munn & Greer, 2015), and it is known that work–family policy utilization is more frequent among women than among men in all European countries (European Parliament, 2015; Moss, 2011). However, it remains unclear whether organizational aspects also affect men and women differently. All in all, this chapter contributes to the understanding of work–family policy utilization by studying the following question: *To what extent do organizational support and/or organizational characteristics explain the utilization of parental leave, and does this differ for men and women?*

Parental leave in Europe

Parental leave can be distinguished from maternity and paternity leave by its aim and characteristics – though this distinction is not clear-cut in all countries. Maternity leave is generally aimed at protecting the health of mother and child, and limited to the period directly before and after the delivery of the child. Paternity leave is generally short (2–15 days), directly surrounding the delivery, and well-compensated. Parental leave varies in length, can often be taken when the child is a bit older, and is rarely fully compensated (Moss, 2017; Van Belle, 2016).

Following the 2010 Parental Leave Directive of the European Union (Directive 2010/18/EU), all EU member states are to provide employees with at least four months parental leave. The directive leaves it to countries to decide on the specifics of the parental leave, including eligibility, possibilities for part-time take-up, and whether the leave is a “family right” (meaning that the couple is jointly entitled to a period of leave and can decide which partner takes it) or an individual right (both partners are individually entitled to leave). According to the EU directive, at least one of the four months is to be non-transferable

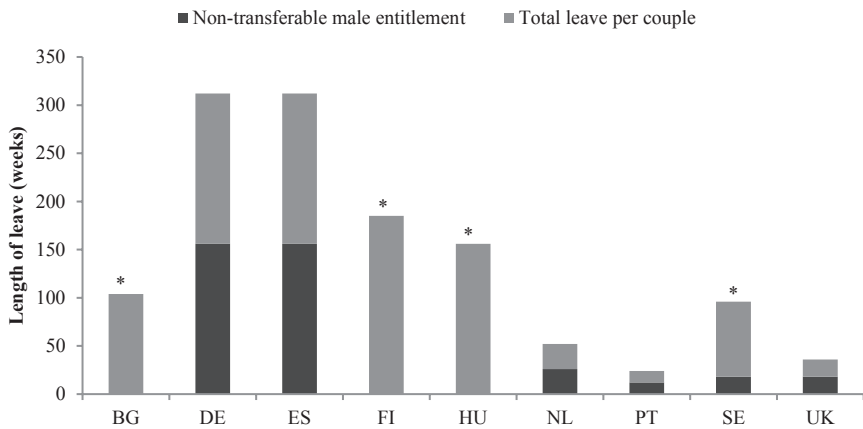


Figure 5.1 Length of parental leave in the ESWS countries, total leave per couple^a and non-transferable male entitlements.^b

Source: Based on information from the International Network on Leave Policies and Research (2016), complemented with data from the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2015).

Notes

BG – Bulgaria; DE – Germany; ES – Spain; FI – Finland; HU – Hungary; NL – Netherlands; PT – Portugal; SE – Sweden; UK – United Kingdom.

* Parental leave is awarded as a family right (i.e., the couple can divide it among themselves), not an individual right.

a The total leave per couple is in ‘family right’ countries the period that is awarded to the couple jointly; in countries with individual entitlements it includes the individual right twice.

b The non-transferable male entitlement refers to the period that is exclusively reserved for the male partner. Although in the ‘family right’ countries men could take more leave – as the partners can divide it between them – in practice this is mostly used by the female partner (van Belle, 2016).

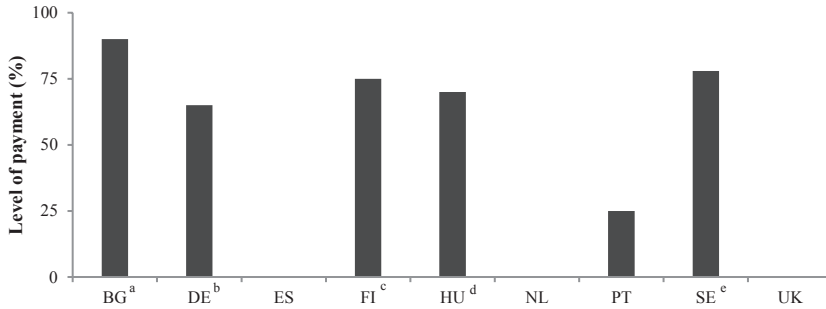


Figure 5.2 Level of payment of parental leave in the ESWS countries.

Source: Based on information from the International Network on Leave Policies and Research (2016), complemented with data from the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2015).

Notes

BG – Bulgaria; DE – Germany; ES – Spain; FI – Finland; HU – Hungary; NL – Netherlands; PT – Portugal; SE – Sweden; UK – United Kingdom.

There is no guaranteed level of payment for parental leave in Spain, the Netherlands, and the UK.

a For 26 weeks, then flat-rate.

b For 52 weeks (up to a ceiling), with an extra 8 weeks if both partners take at least 8 weeks, then unpaid.

c For 4 weeks, then 70 percent (both up to a ceiling).

d For 108 weeks (up to a ceiling), then flat-rate; non-insured parents only get the flat-rate.

e For 56 weeks, then 13 weeks at flat-rate.

between partners, in order to incentivize men to partake in childrearing. This, however, has not been implemented in all countries (European Parliament, 2015; International Network on Leave Policies and Research, 2016). In countries with a family right where no period of leave is specifically reserved for male use, all leave is frequently taken by the female partner (Van Belle, 2016). Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the length of parental leave (as a family entitlement and as a male entitlement), and the level of payment in the nine ESWS countries. It can be seen that countries differ strongly on all dimensions.

Theory and hypotheses

The family-supportiveness of the organizational culture

Though few studies have taken a systematic, multilevel approach to studying the utilization of parental leave (or work–family policies more broadly), theoretical (e.g., McDonald et al., 2005), qualitative (e.g., Kaufman, 2017; Lewis & Den Dulk, 2008; Ter Hoeven et al., 2017), and small-scale quantitative studies (e.g., Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Den Dulk & Peper, 2007; Haas et al., 2002; Pettigrew, 2014; Smith & Gardner, 2007; Thompson et al., 1999) have stressed the importance of a family-supportive organizational culture for employees' use

of work–family policies. Organizations have a distinct organizational culture which supports or discourages the integration of employees’ work and family lives (Thompson et al., 1999). This, in turn relates to the sense of entitlement that employees feel regarding the use of available policies (Lewis & Smithson, 2001). Many organizations that are unsupportive towards employees’ family responsibilities adhere to “ideal worker” culture (Acker, 1990). The notion of an “ideal worker” is based on the traditional male breadwinner: an employee who exists only for the job, and has no other (family) responsibilities that are interfering (for example, because he has a homemaker spouse). Organizations with a strong ideal worker culture expect their employees never to prioritize family, and when employees do (for example, by using leave) they are seen as less committed to their job, which often has consequences for their career progression (Acker, 1990; Haas & Hwang, 2016; Lyonette, 2015; Munn & Greer, 2015). Other organizations, however, adhere less to ideal worker culture, and actively support employees who want to use work–family policies, either because they believe that it will result in better employee productivity, or because they feel a social or moral responsibility to do so (Been, Den Dulk, & Van der Lippe, 2017a), meaning that employees do not need to fear repercussions and feel more free to use work–family policies.

In addition to the general organizational culture, employees’ direct managers are important agents that influence their work–life decisions, and managers can independently withhold or provide support. Managers may adhere to the (ideal worker) norms of the organizational culture, but they are independent actors who can also convey a different message, namely, that choosing family over work is or is not acceptable in their team (Allen, 2001; Den Dulk & De Ruijter, 2005, 2008). Because managers hold a key position in shaping the future career of an employee, employees are likely to want to live up to their manager’s expectations (Allen, 2001; Perlow, 1995), making employees more likely to use work–family policies if their manager is supportive than if (s)he is not. Therefore, we expect that employees in an organization with a more family-supportive organizational culture (Hypothesis 1a) and those who have a manager who is more family-supportive (Hypothesis 1b) are more likely to use parental leave.

Institutional theory and business-case argumentation

There are two main theories that treat organizations as actors that make strategic choices to invest in work–family policies: institutional theory and business-case argumentation. Institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) maintains that organizations *adopt* work–family policies – and human resource practices more broadly – in response to institutional pressures. Organizations with certain characteristics face more institutional pressures and thus experience a stronger need to obtain legitimacy than other organizations (Goodstein, 1994). We rely on three organizational characteristics which are commonly perceived as indicative of high institutional pressures for the adoption of work–family policies, and which have frequently been found to be of importance in

predicting work–family policy adoption, namely: organization size, ownership (i.e., public or private ownership), and proportion of women within an organization (Den Dulk, Groeneveld, Ollier-Malaterre & Valcour, 2013; Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons, 1995). Larger organizations and organizations in the public sector are deemed to be more susceptible to external, societal pressures, while organizations with a higher proportion of women face greater pressures from within, as women would be more likely to call for the adoption of work–family policies than men (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons, 1995).

Institutional theory has repeatedly been applied to the adoption of additional work family–policies (Den Dulk et al., 2013; Goodstein, 1994; Haas & Hwang, 2009; Ingram & Simons, 1995), but whether it can also be extended to the *utilization* of work–family policies is unclear. For a long time scholars maintained that greater institutional pressures would only lead to policy adoption, but not to utilization, because the policies would be adopted for symbolic rather than substantive reasons (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). However, we argue that institutional theory could also extend to policy use, because when organizations face institutional pressures and adopt work–family policies this may increase both practical accessibility and awareness and entitlement among employees.³ For example, when policies are adopted an organization’s human resource department formalizes how employees can request utilization and how this will be managed in terms of finances and personnel replacement. This will substantially ease applying for utilization. Similarly, organizations with more institutional pressures are more likely to take their statutory obligation seriously and increase access to work–family policies. Formalized infrastructure will further create enhanced awareness of the available policy as well as a higher sense of entitlement among employees (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Lewis & Smithson, 2001), both of which will lead to higher utilization.

Business-case argumentation also sees organizations as actors that make strategic choices, but focusses more on a financial cost–benefit analysis. In this line of reasoning, organizations are likely to adopt policies when they believe this will be in their own financial interest – for example, because it will attract or retain desirable employees, or because it increases the performance of current employees – but set this off against the expected costs of the policy (Been, 2015; Den Dulk, 2001; Kossek & Friede, 2006; Wheatley, 2017). Following this line of reasoning, larger organizations would be more likely to provide work–family policies, because it is easier to redistribute work to other employees or to hire temporary replacements, i.e., the costs of having these policies is lower (Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Haas & Hwang, 2009). Moreover, because public organizations are less profit-oriented, they would be less opposed to employee absences that might cause production loss (Bygren & Duvander, 2006), making it easier for employees to use such policies. Lastly, employees in public organizations might feel more entitled to use work–family policies as these are seen as “compensating differentials” to the lower salaries in the public sector; people have *chosen* to work in the public sector, knowing that it will pay less but provide better access to secondary employment conditions, such as work–family policies

(Groeneveld, Steijn, & Van der Parre, 2009; Rosen, 1986). Thus, they feel more entitled to use these policies. We therefore expect that employees who work in organizations that are large (Hypothesis 2a), that are in the public sector (Hypothesis 2b), and have a higher proportion of female employees (Hypothesis 2c) are more likely to use parental leave.

Gender

Parental leave policies are frequently aimed at women, and women tend to have better access to them, or are entitled to longer periods of leave. Thus, it is not surprising that women use parental leave more frequently and for longer periods than their male counterparts (European Parliament, 2015; Moss, 2011). This is in line with prevailing normative prescriptions regarding gender norms, which continue to hold that women shoulder the main responsibility for home and childcare, and men for paid labor (Kanji & Samuel, 2017; Munn & Greer, 2015). Using work–family policies violates ideal worker norms (Acker, 1990), but for women it is in line with gender norms that still oppose full-time maternal employment (Booth & Van Ours, 2009; Roeters & Craig, 2014). This means that it is not only more acceptable for women to use work–family policies, but that they are also more expected to do so, and that this has a price in that they are taken less seriously at work (Evertsson & Duvander, 2011). For men, on the other hand, using work–family policies clearly violates expectations regarding masculinity and being an ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Kanji & Samuel, 2017), making men less inclined to use these policies. We thus expect the utilization of parental leave to be higher among women than among men (Hypothesis 3a).

Having outlined how using work–family policies is a stronger violation of gender norms for men than for women, we can expect organizational support factors to play a larger role in the utilization decisions of men than in those of women. After all, women feel they have access to the use of work–family policies even when they are not actively supported in this. Men, however, need to violate ‘normal’ behavior, which is costly, but it becomes less costly when they experience organizational support. Similarly, we can expect that organizational characteristics will play a larger role for men than for women, considering that these can lead to easier and more institutionalized access to policies. In other words, the relationship between organizational support factors (Hypothesis 3b) and organizational characteristics (Hypothesis 3c) and the utilization of parental leave is stronger for men than for women.

Method

Sample

For the purpose of this chapter we rely on a sub-sample of parents with a child under four years old, because we wanted to make sure their leave use was recent

in order to minimize the risk that organizational factors had changed over time (e.g., if people were assigned to a different manager between their parental leave use and the time they completed the survey). We also excluded people who did not work for their current employer at the time they became parents, as the characteristics of their current workplace would not be related to their past use of leave policies. This led to a sample of 1,211 people. We then excluded employees with missing values on gender ($n = 4$), but used multiple imputations with regression switching (Van Buuren & Oudshoorn, 1999) for missing cases on all other variables. Our total sample consists of 1,207 employees in 521 teams and 232 organizations.

Measures

Use of parental leave

Our dependent variable *use of parental leave* (0 = no use, 1 = use) is measured by asking respondents, “Did you use parental leave in connection with the birth of your youngest child?” Note that this refers to whether respondents took *any* leave at all, but says nothing about the duration of the leave. We chose to measure this variable in this way for country comparability; using, for example, a month of parental leave is a long period in some countries, but very short in others. By looking at use dichotomously we use a more crude, yet more comparable, measure.

Organizational support

In this chapter we use both a subjective and an objective measure for organizational support and managerial support. Subjective measures capture whether employees *perceive* their organization and manager to be supportive, reasoning that the *perception* of employees influences their behavior. However, using two self-reported measures (perceived organizational support and the leave used) introduces common-method bias which can be limited using objective measures, especially when these are reported by different actors such as managers or HR managers (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, we also include two objective indicators as proxies for cultural and managerial support, namely, collegial use of work–family policies and managerial use of work–family policies. Collegial use of work–family policies is a proxy for the supportiveness of the organizational culture, because in a supportive culture employees are more likely to use leave. Moreover, managerial use of work–family policies can be seen as a proxy of a managerial support for two reasons: (1) managers who value work–family integration are more likely to have used parental leave themselves; and (2) because of their personal experiences they are likely to be more supportive of employees wanting to use leave, and can serve as role models.

Our subjective measure for cultural support and managerial support is based on a reduced scale using Thompson et al.’s (1999) measure of organizational

work–family culture. The scale consists out of nine items to which respondents could respond on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. We conducted a factor analysis which showed two clear factors both consisting of three items. Based on this, we constructed two variables: *perceived cultural support*, and *perceived managerial support*. Perceived cultural support is based on three items: “employees are often expected to take work home at night or during the weekend”; “to turn down a promotion or transfer for family-related reasons will seriously hurt one’s career progress in this organization”; and “to get ahead in this organization, employees are expected to work overtime.” It has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.67. Perceived managerial support is also based on three items: “my manager is understanding when I have to put my family first”; “higher management encourages supervisors to be sensitive to employees’ family concerns”; and “my manager is very accommodating of family-friendly needs.” It has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.79.

Our objective measure for cultural support is measured as the *use of parental leave by colleagues*, as reported by the HR manager. HR managers reported on a 7-point scale what proportion of male and female employees who became parents used parental leave. They thus reported this separately for male and female employees, but we took the mean of these two. Additional analyses were conducted where we in turn included use by male and use by female colleagues, but this did not make any difference to the results.

Objective managerial support is measured as *use of parental leave by manager* (no = 0, yes = 1), as reported by the manager. If the manager was childless this was also coded as not having taken leave, as they would not have experienced the benefits of using leave, nor would they have set an example for their subordinates.

Organizational characteristics

Studies vary in their measurement of organizational size, with the majority using either two or three categories or including the log of the number of employees (e.g., Been et al., 2017a; Been et al., 2017b; Den Dulk et al., 2013; Goodstein, 1994; Haas & Hwang, 2009; Ingram & Simons, 1995). In this study we include size of the organization (as reported by the HR manager) dichotomously – because we expected that only large organizations (>1,000 employees) would be susceptible to institutional pressures – rather than as linear increase by organization size. Additional analyses were conducted where we included the log, linearly and quadratically, and used different cut-off points, which can be found in the sensitivity analyses.

Whether an organization is private (0) or public (1) was also reported by the HR manager. Mixed organizations were coded as private, as they would also have a commercial goal, while charities were coded as public. Additional analyses were conducted where this was reversed, which did not change the results.

Lastly, we included the *proportion of women* in an organization, as reported by the HR manager, on a 9-point scale. The range was: “none,” “1 percent to less

than 10 percent,” “10 percent to less than 20 percent,” “20 percent to less than 40 percent,” “40 percent to less than 60 percent,” “60 percent to less than 80 percent,” “80 percent to less than 90 percent,” “90 percent to less than 100 percent,” and “all.” Values were recoded by taking the mid-value for each percentage interval.

Gender and control variables

We include gender as 0=female and 1=male. Moreover, we control for age of the youngest child, because this can be seen as a proxy for how long ago the leave was taken, as it is often taken relatively close to childbirth.

Moreover, we include the sex of the manager as a control variable, as male and female managers might differ in their support for work–family issues due to their different experiences of managing and (not) having a family. We also include whether the manager has children (0=no, 1=yes), as not having used parental leave is different for managers with and without children.

Sector and country fixed effects

We include sector and country dummies as controls, because both the sector and the country in which an organization is situated are likely to influence the organizational context, as well as how common it is for employees to use parental leave.

Descriptive statistics

Figures 5.3 and 5.4 show parental leave use by gender, country, and sector in our sample. Further descriptive statistics are presented in Table 5.1. We see that there is much variation between countries in how much leave men and women use, while the variation between sectors is more limited. Moreover, we see that in our sample, men use parental leave more often than women (46 percent vs 41 percent), which might appear odd considering that register data and representative samples show that women use parental leave more often than men (European Parliament, 2015; Moss, 2011). It should be noted, however, that we do not have a representative sample, and that it is likely that there is a selection effect, which entails that many young mothers will be absent from our organization sample. Moreover, our measure captures whether people used parental leave *at all*, but does not distinguish between the length of the leave. Further reflection on this is included in the discussion.

The correlations between the independent variables were moderate-to-low. Support is measured in a variety of ways, including attitudes and co-worker behavior, which explains some of the low correlations. Correlations between perceptions of managerial and organizational support are moderate ($r=0.34$), suggesting that these are indeed distinct concepts.

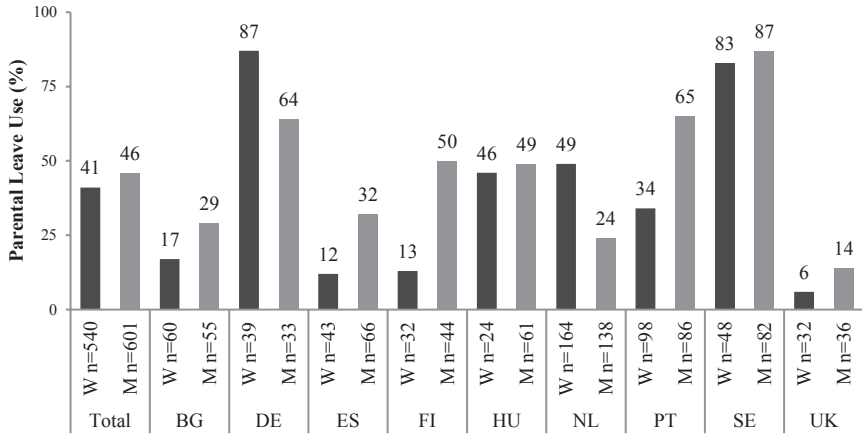


Figure 5.3 Use of parental leave in the ESWS sample, by gender and by country.

Notes

BG – Bulgaria; DE – Germany; ES – Spain; FI – Finland; HU – Hungary; NL – Netherlands; PT – Portugal; SE – Sweden; UK – United Kingdom.

W – Women; M – Men.

Figure calculated based on the non-imputed dataset.

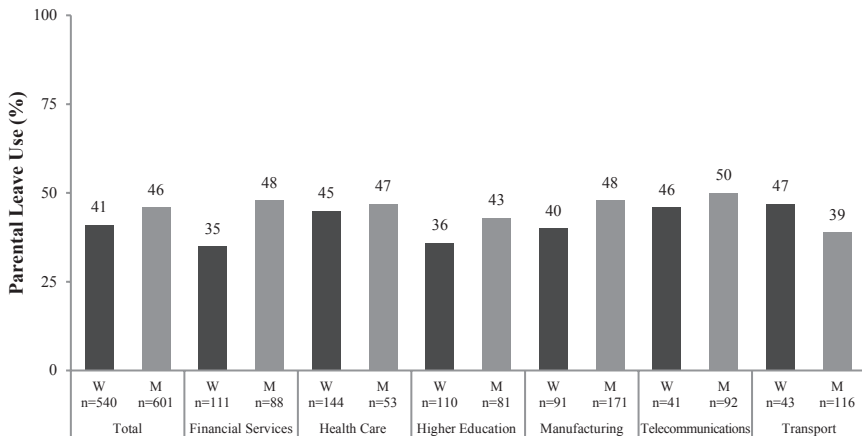


Figure 5.4 Use of parental leave in the ESWS sample, by gender and by sector.

Notes

W – Women; M – Men.

Figure calculated based on the non-imputed dataset.

Table 5.1 Descriptive statistics for men, women and the pooled sample

	Min	Max	Total		Women		Men	
			Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.
<i>Dependent variable</i>								
Use parental leave	0	1	0.43		0.41		0.46	
<i>Independent variables</i>								
<i>Organizational support</i>								
Perceived cultural support	0	1	0.56	0.17	0.55	0.17	0.57	0.17
Perceived managerial support	0	1	0.47	0.16	0.48	0.16	0.46	0.16
Use by colleagues	0	1	0.58	0.34	0.57	0.33	0.60	0.34
Use by manager	0	1	0.17		0.13		0.21	
<i>Organizational characteristics</i>								
Large (>1000 employees)	0	1	0.24		0.28		0.20	
Public	0	1	0.35		0.44		0.27	
Proportion of women	0	1	0.48	0.23	0.55	0.22	0.41	0.22
<i>Controls</i>								
Male	0	1	0.52					
Age youngest child	0	4	2.06	1.27	2.17	1.27	1.96	1.26
Supervisor is male	0	1	0.63		0.51		0.75	
Supervisor has a child	0	1	0.53		0.47		0.59	
<i>Sector</i>								
Financial services			0.17		0.20		0.14	
Health care			0.17		0.26		0.08	
Higher education			0.16		0.19		0.13	
Manufacturing			0.24		0.17		0.29	
Telecommunications			0.12		0.08		0.15	
Transportation			0.15		0.10		0.19	
<i>Country</i>								
Bulgaria			0.11		0.13		0.09	
Finland			0.06		0.05		0.07	
Germany			0.06		0.07		0.05	
Hungary			0.08		0.05		0.10	
Netherlands			0.26		0.29		0.23	
Portugal			0.16		0.18		0.15	
Spain			0.10		0.09		0.12	
Sweden			0.11		0.08		0.13	
UK			0.06		0.06		0.06	
N			1,207		583		624	

Note

Means and standard deviations reported using the non-imputed dataset.

Analytical strategy

All measures were recoded to range from 0–1 to ease interpretation. We used linear probability models with clustered standard errors to predict the probability of using parental leave. Linear probability models constitute the use of a regular ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for predicting a dichotomous variable. As set out by Hellevik (2009) this is an acceptable alternative to using a logistic regression as long as the dependent variable is not too skewed. Linear probability models have the additional advantage of easier interpretation (Hellevik, 2009). Results from a linear probability model can be interpreted as the increase in probability of the dependent variable being 1 (i.e., one uses leave) as the independent variable changes from 0 to 1. In other words, if, for example, the use by a manager has a coefficient of 0.20, this means that people with a manager who used parental leave are 20 percent more likely to use parental leave than people with a manager who did not use parental leave. As a robustness check we also ran logistic regression models, which led to the same results.

In addition, we used clustered standard errors on the organization-level to account for the fact that our observations are not independent, as employees are nested within organizations. Additional analyses were run where we included a multilevel model, which led to similar results. It was not possible to use clustered standard errors on the department-level – or a multilevel model which includes both the department- and the organization-level – as too few people per department are included in our selected sample (i.e., too few people had a child within the past four years).

Results

Figure 5.5 shows the increase in one's probability of using leave, both with and without country and sector fixed effects. Starting at the results without country and sector controls, we see a positive significant effect of the two objective measurements of organizational support, namely, use of parental leave by colleagues and use of parental leave by one's manager. This indicates that when an employee's colleagues have used leave, (s)he is 21 percent more likely to have used parental leave as well. Similarly, when an employee's manager has used leave, the probability that the employee uses leave increases by 20 percent. No significant effect of the subjective support variables (perceived cultural and managerial support), organizational characteristics (size, public sector, and proportion of women), or gender was found.

Sector and country fixed effects

As can be seen in Figure 5.5, the effects of both collegial and managerial use of parental leave are fully explained by the inclusion of country dummies. This probably stems from the fact that there are vast policy and cultural variations between countries, which can explain a respondent's own use of parental leave,

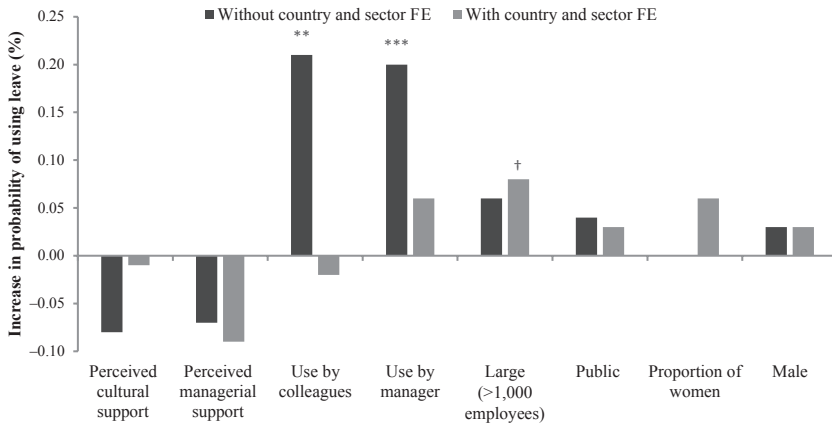


Figure 5.5 Probabilities of using leave without and with sector and country fixed-effects.

Notes

$N = 1207$.

Estimates based on linear probability model with clustered standard errors for the organization.

Control variables: age youngest child, gender manager, whether manager has children.

† $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (2-sided tests).

collegial use, and managerial use – after all, in some countries it is either very common or very uncommon to use leave. When we include country and sector dummies, we do find an effect of the size of the organization, indicating that employees in a larger organization have an 8 percent higher probability of using leave than employees in a smaller organization, which supports Hypothesis 2a. No support was found for Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b, regarding supportive organizational culture and managerial support, nor for Hypothesis 2b and Hypothesis 2c regarding organizations in the public sector or with a higher proportion of women.

When we include country and sector fixed effects separately, we see that the change in the effects of the independent variables results from the inclusion of country dummies, but that no such change occurs when only sector dummies are included. Country differences contribute significantly to the probability of using parental leave, while sector does not. For this reason, we will explore country differences further in the sensitivity analyses.

Gender differences

Based on Figure 5.5 we rejected the hypothesis that the use of parental leave would be higher among women than among men (Hypothesis 3a). We want to further test whether the importance of the independent variables is different for men and for women, as hypothesized in Hypothesis 3b and Hypothesis 3c. Figure 5.6 shows the same model as Figure 5.5 with sector and country fixed

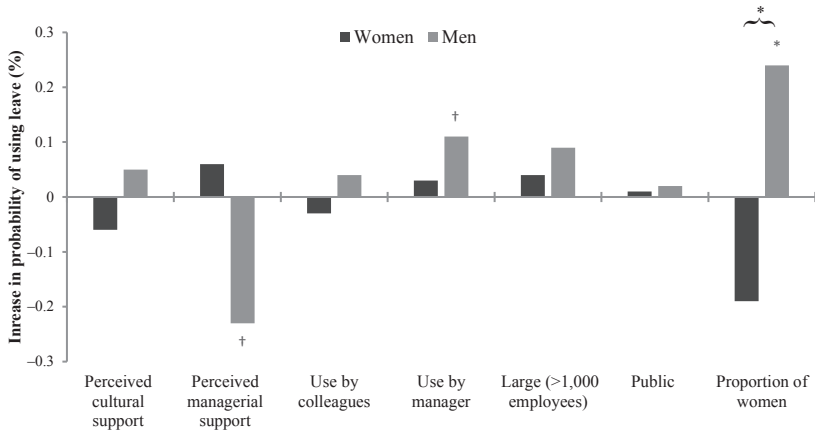


Figure 5.6 Probabilities of using leave, separately for women and men.

Notes

N women = 624, N men = 583.

Estimates based on linear probability model with clustered standard errors for the organization.

Control variables: age youngest child, gender manager, whether manager has a child, sector, country.

† $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (2-sided).

— indicates that the estimates significantly differ between women and men.

effects, but this time conducted separately for men and women. Starting with women, we see that none of the included variables affect women's parental leave use. For men, we see that three variables relate to their parental leave use, namely, perceived managerial support, use of leave by the manager, and the proportion of women in the organization. It should be noted, however, that perceived managerial support relates *negatively* to male parental leave use (-23 percent), while we expected this to have a positive effect. The other two effects are in the expected direction, i.e., men are 11 percent more likely to use parental leave if their manager did so as well, and 24 percent more likely to use parental leave if they work in an organization with a higher proportion of women. However, when we test the difference between the effects for men and for women, we see that only the effect of proportion of women in the organization is significantly different for men and for women. This is not the case for perceived managerial support and use by manager. Therefore, we reject Hypothesis 3b, as we find that for none of the organizational support variables is there evidence that they have a greater effect on the utilization of parental leave for men than for women. We partially reject Hypothesis 3c, as we find only for one organizational characteristic – the proportion of women – a stronger effect for men than for women, but no difference for organization size and public sector.

Sensitivity analyses

In order to better understand the effect that was found of size of the organization, organizational size was included in a number of ways to see if the effect was linear, quadratic (i.e., first increases and then decreases or vice versa), or occurred at different cut-off points than the one currently included (1,000 employees or more). No linear or quadratic effect was found. When including different categories, we see that the effect really occurs among the largest category compared to smaller categories, indicating that (as is theoretically expected) parental leave use is higher in really large organizations than in smaller organizations, rather than that it linearly increases as organizations become larger.

Additional country analyses

Previously, we saw that including country fixed effects substantially changed our results, and that there were large significant effects of the country dummies. This suggests that the prevalence of using parental leave differs strongly between countries, and that these country differences are of greater importance than most organizational factors or sector differences. Although we were not able to conduct analyses separately per country, we did conduct a jackknife procedure (i.e., exclude each country in turn), as well as clustered analyses for countries that were similar in the length of time or level of pay offered for parental leave. These show quite similar results: we find an effect of size of the organization. Although this effect sometimes falls short of conventional statistical significance, it is always in the same direction and point estimates are comparable in size. When we cluster countries based on the duration of the leave, we have two groups: countries with relatively long leave (Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Spain, and Sweden), and countries with relatively short leave periods (the Netherlands, Portugal, and the UK). We find no effects in either group. When we cluster countries based on level of pay for parental leave, we have, on the one hand, countries where leave is substantially paid (Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, and Sweden) and, on the other hand, countries where parental leave is (largely) unpaid (the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the UK). It is notable that we find two effects in the countries where leave is largely paid: a negative effect of perceived managerial support (25 percent) and a positive effect of organization size (15 percent), while no effects are found in the lesser-paying countries (though it should be noted that the difference between the two clusters is only statistically significant for organization size). Based on this, we would cautiously suggest that organizational factors are of greater importance for parental leave use in countries where parental leave is relatively well paid than in countries where it is not.

Discussion

In this chapter we examined how far organizations relate to the utilization of parental leave, and whether this differed for men and women. The ESWS, with its multi-country and multi-organization design, allowed us to be the first to make a large-scale, systematic study of the relationship between organizations and work–family policy use. In doing so we combined two ways of looking at organizations: the family-supportiveness of their organizational culture, and by treating them as actors that make strategic choices to invest in policies. We found few systematic effects of organizations on employees parental leave use over and above the variation in institutional settings. Only one, out of a total of seven organizational aspects that were included, was shown to be related to leave utilization: namely, the size of the organization. No gender differences were found in parental leave use, but we did find some variation in how organizational factors affect the use of parental leave between men and women.

Our most important finding is that organizational aspects played a smaller role than we expected, and that much of the variation is explained by country differences. On the one hand, this may perhaps seem unsurprising: considering the wide array of variations in country-level parental leave provisions and cultural norms surrounding leave utilization, it is to be expected that leave utilization varies strongly between countries. On the other hand, numerous qualitative and small-scale quantitative studies have found that parents use of work–family policies is affected by organizational factors, especially organizational support (e.g., Allen, 2001; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Den Dulk & Peper, 2007; Haas et al., 2002; McDonald et al., 2005; Smith & Gardner, 2007; Thompson et al., 1999). This had led us to expect that even in varying contextual settings the effect of certain organizational factors would function similarly; i.e., while in some countries it might be more or less common to use work–family policies, there will always be some people for whom this decision is not clear-cut, and whose decision is influenced by the organizational context. This, in our study, did not prove to be the case. **Although sample-size restrictions prevented us from conducting in-depth country comparative analyses, our results suggest that organizational aspects might only be relevant in countries where parental leave use is relatively well paid.** We maintain that this would theoretically make sense: only once employees have the (financial) freedom to choose between using and not using parental leave, do organizational aspects become important. Previous research has also shown that when income replacement of parental leave is low, employees are less likely to use leave but find other alternatives instead, such as dropping out of employment or switching to part-time work (Brinton & Mun, 2016; Pettigrew, 2014).

While country variations proved most important, we still found evidence that one organizational characteristic relates to parental leave use: organization size. Employees in larger organizations were more likely to use parental leave than employees in smaller organizations. This can be explained through the strategic choices made by larger organizations in comparison to smaller ones.

According to institutional theory, larger organizations face more societal pressures than smaller organizations, and wish to obtain social legitimacy through the adoption of additional work–family policies or the implementation of statutory work–family policies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Goodstein, 1994). Additionally, business-case argumentation maintains that larger organizations would be more likely to adopt and implement work–family policies because it is cheaper for them to do so than smaller organizations – for example, because it is easier to redistribute work to other employees, or to hire temporary replacements (Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Haas & Hwang, 2009). Simultaneously, organizations would deem these policies to have benefits such as the attraction and retention of employees, and higher productivity (Been, 2015; Den Dulk, 2001; Kossek & Friede, 2006; Wheatley, 2017). It is notable, however, that we do not find a similar effect for public organizations and organizations with a greater proportion of women, although these are theoretically expected to experience similar institutional pressures as large organizations. This might suggest that the observed effect for large organizations can be explained by business-case considerations rather than institutional pressures: the costs of making work–family policies available are lower for large organizations, but are not necessarily lower for public organizations or for those with a large proportion of women. Additionally, large organizations might be particularly focused on attracting desirable employees, which is not necessarily the case for public organizations or those with a large proportion of women. Thus, large organizations would attach greater value to the benefits of having work–family policies, which extends to higher levels of policy utilization.

Turning to gender differences, we found no significant difference between men and women’s likelihood of using parental leave, while we know that this is the case in reality (European Parliament, 2015; Moss, 2011). This probably stems from our measure, which captures whether people used parental leave *at all*, but does not distinguish between the length of the leave. Moreover, as we sampled people in their workplace, there might be a selection effect where many young mothers who had used parental leave were absent from our sample, because they were not at work during the time of the survey. This is less likely to be an issue for men, who tend to take shorter leave (OECD, 2016).

We do find that organizations affect the utilization decisions of men, but not of women. This suggests that the organizational context is not only *more* influential for men’s utilization decisions than for women’s, but that it hardly plays a role for women at all. Possibly, this stems from the fact that gender norms prescribe that men are primarily responsible for work and women for family (Acker, 1990; Kanji & Samuel, 2017; Munn & Greer, 2015). This means that it is often *expected* that women will be active caregivers, by using work–family policies or perhaps even dropping out of employment altogether. Men, on the other hand, are workers first, and base the extent of their involvement at home partially on pressures from the organizational context at work.

For men, we found an effect of perceived managerial support, use of leave by manager, and proportion of women in the organization. It should particularly be

noted that, contrary to what we expected, having a manager who is supportive related to men using *less* rather than more parental leave. This might stem from the fact that we measure *general* support for work–family issues, rather than specific support for parental leave use (Den Dulk, Peper, Kanjuo Mrčela, & Ignjatović, 2016). This might entail that male employees with supportive managers are more able to accommodate work and family without needing to use formal arrangements, such as using parental leave. For women, this might function differently, because managers are more likely to accommodate men informally, while encouraging women to use formal arrangements that help them with childcare (Booth & Van Ours, 2009; Roeters & Craig, 2014).

Limitations and implications

Although this study makes some important contributions to the literature, there are at least three important limitations from which future research could learn. First, our results show the importance of studying in-depth country variations, but unfortunately we were not able to do this because of sample-size restrictions. These issues warrant further investigation, but the complexities in obtaining a multi-country dataset that includes large samples per country suggest that perhaps smaller studies that focus on one or a few countries may be a more realistic approach. Our findings suggest that utilization decisions function differently across European countries, and therefore we caution researchers about extrapolating the results regarding work–family policy use from one country to another.

Second, in this study we used a rather crude measure of parental leave, through which we could only dichotomously distinguish whether employees used any parental leave, and not include any information on the duration of the leave. This was done in order to ease comparing parental leave over countries, as the differences in national leave provisions substantially complicate comparing whether a certain period of leave constitutes long or short parental leave. However, the crudeness of our measure obviously prevented us from capturing the depth of variations in parental leave. Similarly, as mentioned above, the measure used for perceived support was not specific to support for parental leave. Using such a specific measure might lead to very different results (Den Dulk et al., 2016).

Third, we use cross-sectional multilevel organization data, which has the huge advantage of including information on employees, their managers, *and* the organization, but has the disadvantage of excluding people who were not present in the organization to be sampled, particularly women who were using parental leave at the time the survey was carried out.

Conclusion

All in all, this chapter shows that the influence of organizations on employees' parental leave use is limited – we only find this for organization size – and that,

instead, country variations play a very large role. We therefore underline the importance of conducting country-specific research, and stress the importance of taking caution when extrapolating findings from one country to another in the field of work–family policy research – this might not function as universally as is sometimes assumed. Moreover, our findings indicate that organizations play a role in the utilization decisions of men but not in those of women, suggesting that while women are expected to use parental leave, men base the extent of their involvement at home partially on pressures from the organizational context at work. Although we were unable to conduct country-specific analyses, our findings suggest that organizational aspects are of greater importance for utilization decisions in countries where parental leave is (partially) paid than in countries where it is not, suggesting that organizational aspects come into play when the national conditions create a situation where people have the (financial) freedom to choose between using and not using parental leave.

Notes

- 1 For a notable exception see Bygren and Duvander (2006), who rely on Swedish register data regarding individuals and workplaces to predict fathers' parental leave use.
- 2 In this study we look specifically at parental leave, although we extrapolate from research on other work–family policies, such as paternity or maternity leave, part-time work, childcare support, and flexibility. Studies that look specifically into parental leave policies are scarce (Mulvaney, 2014), yet they provide good cases because parental leave policies are “employee serving” rather than “organization serving”; they are instigated at the request of the employee and do not directly serve the organization – in contrast to, for example, flexible working hours, which can also be used to make employees work flexible hours that suit the company. This makes it not clear-cut that organizations want to increase utilization (Leslie et al., 2012; Wheatley, 2017).
- 3 Note that Pasamar and Alegre (2015) also applied institutional theory to policy utilization, but they focus more on disentangling different types of external pressures and do not explicitly set out how these pressures would not only lead to adoption but also to utilization.